

Sunday, August 5, 2018
 Lectionary 18
 11th Sunday after Pentecost

One Baptism

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

Delivered to St. Stephen's Lutheran Church

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*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable
 in your sight of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Amen

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Paul, a prisoner in the Lord, begs the community in Ephesus to lead lives worth of their calling...to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

In our lives together - through our commonality in baptism - through the work of God that we do with our own frail human hands - we learn to live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

In Holy Baptism, in the bond between the newly baptized and those witnesses to this sacrament, we come before God in all humility and gentleness...we need the patience of the communion of saints, of those baptized loved ones that now are a part of the cloud of witnesses...the saints of heaven...we need their patience and their witness to bear with one another in love.

Notice that Paul says bear with one another and not bear one another...the choice of words may seem small but their implication is great.

To simply bear one another means to just tolerate each other, and yes tolerance is good...but Paul and God want us to do and be so much more than that.

Paul wants us to bear with one another - to live, and move, and love, and have our very essence of being with each other - to literally see life as a journey that needs everyone of us taking our own role...our own part...our own contribution to the whole.

When we learn to bear this life with one another...together...how could we not have the peace of God that surpasses all understanding?

How could we be without peace if we learn to live with and to bear the burdens of one another?

When a church baptizes a member, especially a little one, we take on a heavy burden.

We ask the sponsors and the Godparents...we ask the grandparents and the parents to make promises to raise this child, to raise Kayah as a faithful person.

To raise her a person of God, knowledgeable in the scriptures...knowledgeable in the faith...and to live life without a doubt that she is a beloved child of God.

The church takes on a burden as well - the church...you all - the church is asked if they too will take on the burden of responsibility to help raise Kyah in the faith of Christ Jesus and of the church universal.

And we respond - "we will and we ask God to help us."

Does this seem difficult?

Does it seem almost impossible to do this, to make this holy promise just as we have made to Lillian and John...just as we have to countless other babies and their families?

I see some nodding their heads - and I do hope that we see this as a tough task...

I hope that we see this as a serious task...

Paul was tasked with raising up a church out of just a small band of Jews and gentiles that wanted to follow this Jesus and his teachings...

But you know what?

You and Paul know something very special about this Jesus and his teachings...we all know that he asks a lot from us...that Jesus is a tough person to follow and emulate, but never forget what Jesus said to his disciples:

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

How many of you have been baptized (wait for hands and then ask to keep your hands up if you remember your baptism).

Many of us were baptized as children...babies...and we do not have knowledge of that moment or day, but we have forever been claimed by God, washed in the waters of faith and sealed with the cross of Christ and the Holy Spirit...even three small drops of water upon your head...even if you do not remember that moment...you were baptized and brought into the church of Christ and claimed as member of a community.

This solitary event - this one time moment - has laid claim to you as a beloved child of God.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”

Even a drop of water is enough for a God that is above and through and in all things...Paul reminds us just how big God is and how even in the smallest of things, or in this case the smallest of people, the eyes and face of our God is ever present.

But it is not baptism that makes the face of God shine in people - baptized or unbaptized God's face is ever present in the person across from you and God's face is ever present in yours.

We can never doubt for a moment that we, you and me, are people of God.

In that unity, with that faith we can accomplish so much.

We don't know what the future holds for Kyah...we may not know what the future holds for us...but Paul reminds us that we are all important and that God has blessed us with talents all different all holy.

“The gifts [God] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, [nurses and doctors, factory workers and farmers, store clerks and custodians...even mothers...fathers...siblings...all this] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”

No matter who you are - no matter what you do - your gifts are so important to God that they are literally part of a greater whole that simply is meant to build up the body of Christ in this world.

Christ no long has hands to heal or feet to walk...he no longer has a mouth to speak or ears to listen...but he has you. Each and every one of you. Each of you are part of the body of Christ and Paul is urging us...no Paul is begging us to live a life worthy of the calling we all have.

The disciples ask Jesus ‘what must we do to perform the works of God?’

And they were desperate for another sign...remember that just a few sentences ago Jesus fed 5,000 men plus their wives and children....but the disciples were eager to have a sign that would show them how they could perform the works of God.

They want a sign that God is with them...just as the people with Moses had a sign that God would still feed them. The sign was mana being rained down on the hungry travelers...and these folks with Jesus wanted just as clear a sign as their ancestors.

And Jesus tells them “truly I tell you that it is my father that gives the true bread from heaven...I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

When Jesus is the bread of your life...when you eat the bread of life at this table...this table that is open to all and closed to none...when Jesus is the bread of your life...you will find your God given gift and you will build up the body of Christ in this world. In this time. For these people and those people...for one another...and most of all...for Kyah and all the newly baptized.

When Jesus is the bread of your life you cannot help but live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

When Jesus is the bread of your life - you matter - you are loved - you are a child of God.